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ABSTRACT

This position paper outlines the essential characteristics of a reading program which will enable the schools of the state of New York to eliminate functional illiteracy among thousands of elementary and secondary students and to attain the ultimate goal of reading education: people who can and do use reading for the achievement of educational and occupational goals, the cultivation of the imagination and the enjoyment of leisure time, and full participation in social and civic life. The essential characteristics of a reading program which will serve all students includes: (1) systematic assessment of each student's interests, abilities, and needs; (2) long range and short range goals for each student based on the interrelationship of his interests, abilities, and needs; (3) continuous revision of goals as new learning expands the student's potential; (4) organizational structures within and without the classroom which are most likely to facilitate learning; (5) adequate support systems to facilitate learning, including consultant services, inservice education, and material resources; and (6) a system which effectively measures each individual's mastery of reading objectives and which enables the teacher and the learner to modify or adapt the program as needed. (WR)

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READING

A Statement of Policy
and Proposed Action
by the
REGENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
ALBANY
JULY 1971

CS 000 568

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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President of the University and Commissioner of Education
EWALD B. NYQUIST

Executive Deputy Commissioner of Education
GORDON M. AMBACH

FOREWORD

The costs of illiteracy are shared by both the illiterate and the literate. The person who cannot read is handicapped in a variety of ways; he is less likely to be in the labor force; if he is not in the labor force, he is less likely to be employed; if he is employed, he is less likely to have a full-time job; and if he is employed full-time, his income is likely to be less than that of a literate person. The uneducated are isolated and alienated; and the costs this alienation causes both on the educated and the society as a whole are among the most serious of the cost of illiteracy. The cost to the literate person occurs in the loss of potential economic strength of the Nation and in higher fire, police, welfare, antipoverty, and other social-service payments with which the illiterate burdens the society.

We must recognize that literacy is prerequisite to bringing about individual and social change. We cannot wait for improved social conditions to create a more literate population. Our survival as a nation may well depend upon our willingness and our ability to reduce the alarming incidence of functional illiteracy and to insist that education achieve its primary goal.

Because of these concerns, the Board of Regents has prepared this position paper on reading. The paper is the 12th in a series of statements designed to assist in planning the future development of education in New York State.

I ask that this statement will be given careful consideration by the public and by educational personnel throughout the State and will have the support of the Governor and the Legislature.

Ewald B. Nyquist

EWALD B. NYQUIST
President of the University and
Commissioner of Education

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to read is absolutely essential to complete fulfillment of human potential in today's increasingly complex society. While deficiencies in any major subject area, for example in mathematics, can be crippling factors, the inability to read is deadly. Without this skill the student cannot effectively compete in other areas of scholastic endeavor, much less hope for success in postschool employment and life situations. It is an unquestioned requisite for the good or even the reasonable life, and no child or adult should be denied such capacity.

The position paper which follows, updating and replacing the previous position paper on reading issued in 1963, constitutes more than recognition of the importance of reading and of the deplorable fact that thousands of New York State children, particularly those resident in our large urban centers, are underachieving in this vital skill area. It presents a reasoned analysis of the problems associated with the teaching of reading, states unequivocably that they can be overcome, and constitutes a definite platform on which a course of action for the elimination of functional illiteracy will be established.

This paper does not argue that increased concentration of time and resources, even to the temporary deferral of other academic pursuits in favor of reading, may not be indicated or should not be attempted. It does say without question that the simple concentration of " more of the same " will in the majority of instances be unproductive. Millions of dollars of State and Federal revenues have already been expended on programs which extend ineffective practices both within or during an extension of the school year. The amount of concentration must be a function of degree of need in a particular school, or better, with a particular child; but in any case the program must be rooted in fruitful analysis and instruction.

The State Education Department staff is convinced that there are many effective techniques for teaching reading. These professionals are also convinced that the infinite combination of physiological and environmental factors affecting child development clearly indicate that no one technique will suffice for all. Further, on this same basis they point out that instructional grouping based solely on achievement to date recognizes none of the truly basic factors as to *how* children learn or *how particular* children learn best, but simply assumes that those having certain degrees of skills or disability will somehow learn best *together*. (And unfortunately, usually from the same method!)

What program, then? Obviously, we must conduct a remedial program to meet the needs of present students who have not met standards

of reasonable reading accomplishment as well as provide a maximally productive system for children beginning their public school experience. Accepting the above concept of differences in learning styles, the paper proposes a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to teaching reading in both remedial and normal classroom situations. This concept emphasizes a careful analysis of each individual's learning strengths and weaknesses and the adoption of a method or methods best calculated to capitalize on his potential. Grouping when utilized would be based on similarity of probable response to a given approach rather than on simple similarity of measured achievement. It is fortunate that new evalution techniques such as comprehensive achievement monitoring will be available to help the teacher constantly assess a student's progress and adapt both methods and time allotment in view of his individual progress.

Adoption of a diagnostic-prescriptive approach will necessitate careful training of new teachers and a massive retraining program for presently employed personnel, for its success depends on a wide knowledge of instructional methodology and of child learning psychology and the diagnostic function. The problem is compounded by the unfortunate fact that until this year our teachers were not required to have any definite course background in reading as a prerequisite for certification. This has been remedied and each elementary teacher henceforth will be certified by his college or university as having demonstrated competency in the teaching of reading.

It is primarily on the inservice retraining area that the Department will be asked to concentrate its attention. To carry out the purposes set forth in this statement our staff will draw upon the best practices available in our State and beyond to develop live courses of instruction and " learning packages " emphasizing the approaches described herein. These courses will depict and demonstrate the essential skills, psychological principles, technology, and administrative approaches (including early childhood education) on which a successful program is based. Cadres of teachers will be instructed by our staff; these cadres will in turn instruct other teachers in local districts with an eventual goal of retraining each teacher in our State system. The Regents and staff will afford highest priority to the utilization of special State and Federal funds such as Urban Education, and Title I and Title III ESEA for these purposes, and will encourage local district effort to assure success in this crucial undertaking.

We do not expect to leave this matter entirely with our elementary or special reading teachers. Certainly, all teachers and administrators must assume their share of this responsibility and all schools are

required to plan reading programs consistent with careful diagnoses and projections of pupil reading skill levels. Simply put, our goal implies more than the right to read; it envisions every child a reader, and no other scholastic requirement or practice at any level can be allowed to frustrate satisfaction of this most important priority.

THE READING PROGRAM

The essential characteristics of a reading program which serves all students are:

- *Systematic assessment* of each student's interests, abilities, and needs;
- *Long-range and short-range goals* for each student, based on the interrelationship of his interests, abilities, and needs;
- *Use of alternatives in methods and materials* which enable each student to reach his short-range objectives and move toward the achievement of his long-range goals;
- *Continuous revision of goals* as new learning expands the student's potential;
- *Organizational structures within and without the classroom which are most likely to facilitate learning;*
- *Adequate support systems* to facilitate learning, including consultant services, inservice education, and material resources;
- *A system which effectively measures each individual's mastery* of reading objectives and which enables the teacher and the learner to modify or adapt the program as needed.

Such a program is learner-centered. The teacher no longer functions as a dispenser of information, with learners cast in the role of listeners. Instead, he continuously diagnoses the strengths and weaknesses which each child brings to the reading process, and continuously prescribes appropriate learning activities which build upon strengths and prevent and remedy weaknesses. Since these activities are designed to meet individual needs, each student becomes a more active participant in the learning process, continuously reaching his own goals, and, with the teacher's assistance, setting new goals for himself.

The characteristics of such a program reflect the best current practices in the schools of New York State. For most educational systems, however, full adoption of a learner-centered reading program will require extensive changes in existing educational practices. The fol-

lowing paragraphs indicate some of the most important implications for program design. Because of the overriding importance of improving the quality of teaching in reading programs, the role of the teacher and teacher education are dealt with separately in the next major section of this paper.

Implications for Program Design

1) *Assessment of individual learning patterns and prescription of appropriate learning activities must begin long before the formal introduction of the child to printed materials.* Child development research indicates that the greatest growth in oral language and perceptual and motor-sensory skills occurs between the ages of three and seven. Since each child acquires these skills at a somewhat different rate, appropriately differentiated activities should be encouraged to assist each child to develop his full potential for beginning reading.

Reading-related activities should begin before the child enters school, ideally in the home. Parents should be encouraged to read to children and to provide or improvise simple toys or games which promote perceptual, motor-sensory, and conceptual development. To the greatest extent possible, parents should continue to be part of the educational team after the child has entered school, providing help and guidance both at home and in the school.

Few homes, however, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can offer full opportunity to develop a preschool child's learning potential. Therefore, individualized reading-related activities must be an integral part of the program in prekindergarten and day care centers as well as in the kindergarten. The largely untapped potential of early childhood programs for identifying individual learning needs and prescribing appropriate learning experiences must be developed, particularly in programs which serve the urban disadvantaged. While some early childhood programs, including some Headstart and Follow Through programs, have provided appropriate learning activities, such programs have been too limited in number and capacity to accommodate all who need them.

Full advantage must be taken of the learning experiences available to very young children through mass media. The unprecedented impact of such programs as Sesame Street on the range of readiness children now bring to kindergarten has already demanded change in the early childhood curriculum. Many more kindergarteners are ready for reading activities once considered appropriate only in first grade. Many others, however, still require continued supportive

activities to develop reading readiness. Effective kindergarten programs must provide appropriate tasks for both of these groups.

2) *At the beginning of the reading program, and throughout the program, a variety of alternative instructional methods must be employed to assist each child in learning how to recognize and interpret the written word.* The past decade of reading research indicates that there is no unique method which will guarantee that all children will learn to read with equal ease. It suggests that reading achievement varies more significantly within the population using any given method than between populations using different methods. Therefore, the reading program should not rely on a single method for all children, but should make use of alternative methods which meet the varying needs of individual children.

In learner-centered instruction, the age-old controversy over the value of phonics or look-say as the most successful method for teaching word recognition gives way to selection of those methods to which the individual child responds most readily. If the child learns best through a phonic approach, this method is used. If he responds more readily to other methods — such as language experiences, linguistics, or visual approaches — these are used. After teaching initially to his strength, instructional approaches should be broadened until each child is equipped with a variety of strategies for recognizing and interpreting words.

3) *Instructional materials must be varied to accommodate the great diversity of interests, abilities, needs, and experiences which children bring to the reading process.* Traditionally, reading programs have relied heavily on the use of a single basal reader series and its manuals and workbooks. Many of these materials are primarily designed for children in the midrange of ability, with predominantly middle-class, suburban, or rural backgrounds. Often the same instructional materials are used for all students in a given grade. Such programs make unrealistic demands of some students before they are able to meet them, fail to challenge the faster or more gifted learners, and lack relation to the interests and life styles of many children.

Student interests, needs, and abilities must be determining factors in the selection and preparation of materials for reading instruction. The teacher must be able to choose from a variety of materials those which best meet the needs of a particular reading situation.

In addition to appropriately varied materials for direct instruction, every classroom and library should have and display collections of reading materials which appeal to student's interests and are within

the independent reading levels of those who will use them. Such multimedia materials as films, story filmstrips, and recordings should be included in these collections to stimulate involvement of children in the process of gathering information and cultivate their enjoyment of literature. The students must have appropriate time to use these materials, and the environment in every classroom and library must stimulate the desire to use them.

4) *The teaching of reading must not be exclusively confined to any time or place in the school, but must pervade the entire educational program.* Although development of reading proficiency for all students requires a well-planned program of systematic instruction in essential skills, reading instruction must not be isolated from other aspects of the learning and communication processes. In all his educational experiences, the student should gain reading and reading-related skills, and should be motivated to increase his reading capacity by interest in a variety of subjects. The principles of a learner-centered, diagnostic and prescriptive reading program apply throughout all areas of the elementary and secondary curriculums, and every teacher has a responsibility for awareness and application of these principles.

Reading instruction is universally recognized as a major component of the elementary program. However, every secondary teacher also has a responsibility for providing direct instruction in comprehension skills pertinent to his subject area, geared to the ability and achievement levels of the students in his classes. English teachers continue to have a major responsibility for providing direct instruction in a wide range of reading skills to the broad segment of secondary students for whom no special reading programs are offered.

Special reading programs must be provided for secondary students who have not yet developed the reading proficiency they need to attain their personal, academic, and occupational goals and for those gifted students who should be further challenged to increase their understanding of written language. For many students at this level, specific plans for a career or for education beyond high school create new motivation for improving reading proficiency, and schools must be prepared to capitalize on this renewed readiness.

5) *More flexible methods of organizing the classroom for differentiated instruction must be employed.* Ability grouping based on reading achievement is currently the most frequent instructional arrangement for accommodating diversity of individual abilities and needs. Yet studies have indicated that homogeneous grouping based on achievement levels has undesirable social, educational, and psychological effects. In many classrooms, inflexible ability grouping

tends to label some children as failures at an early age, and foster negative attitudes toward the self and others. Because learning rates and achievement scores are so frequently related to socioeconomic status, such grouping often divides classes into distinct socioeconomic levels. Thus, social and educational interaction opportunities among individuals of varied backgrounds, interests, and talents become limited.

The use of ability grouping must be carefully reevaluated and modified to eliminate these undesirable effects. The reading program should make use of large group, small group, and individualized instruction, as these best meet the needs of particular students and learning situations. When grouping is used, it should be flexible rather than static, and should be based on various combinations of student interests, needs, and abilities, not solely on reading achievement as measured by standardized tests at a particular moment in time. The reading program recommended in this paper, with its emphasis on individual learning objectives and activities, should provide alternatives to exclusive reliance on homogeneous grouping as a method for differentiating instruction.

6) *Improved systems for reporting individual reading achievement must be developed and adopted.* Reporting practices which unduly stress the attainment of grade level or which primarily rank students by assigning numerical or letter values to their achievement must give way to practices which encourage positive attitudes toward reading and eliminate the sense of failure which discourages many students from trying to learn to read. Guidelines for improved reporting practices should emerge as more effective systems for evaluating individual achievement are developed.

Besides destroying confidence, continued failing grades in reading, especially in the early years, often lower the school's educational expectations for the student. In turn, these low expectations tend to limit the opportunities offered to the student in subsequent grades, particularly in schools which use grade levels in reading achievement as a criterion for tracking students into limited educational programs.

7) *Supplementary programs for students with the greatest needs must be continued and strengthened.* Until such time as all schools have comprehensive reading programs which serve students with all ranges of backgrounds and abilities, special reading services must be provided to serve those students for whom the regular program is failing. Such programs must truly supplement regular classroom instruction, by providing a degree of individualization which does not exist in the present structure of the school's regular program. Pro-

grams which do not supplement, but merely extend or repeat content and methods which have already failed the student, have little impact on reading achievement.

The ultimate goal in serving disadvantaged students is improvement of the quality of instruction in all schools and classrooms to which they are assigned. This goal would be more readily attainable if guidelines for supplementary programs became more flexible, to permit funding of inservice education for all teachers who serve disadvantaged children, not only for those who work in specially funded programs. The guidelines should also be expanded to permit use of staff who work in these programs as consultants in all classrooms which serve the disadvantaged, so that the successful characteristics of supplementary programs could be correlated and integrated with the total educational program.

Until all schools develop a program which serves students of all levels of ability including the gifted, supplementary programs must continue to provide individualized diagnostic and prescriptive corrective services for mildly handicapped readers; clinical remedial programs for severely disabled readers; special assistance for bilingual children in language development and reading; primary programs to prevent later reading difficulties by identifying learning problems and intervening to resolve them; preschool and kindergarten experiences which develop the underlying perceptual, motor-sensory language, and conceptual functions needed for success in reading; adequate inservice education and supervision for both professional and paraprofessional staff; and reading services for parents and functionally illiterate adults through adult basic education programs.

8) *All educational resources must be brought to bear on creating conditions in which children will become independent, self-motivated readers.* Reading will continue to be learned as an essential skill in every variety of school, redesigned or traditional, open or relatively structured. This paper does not directly address itself to the need for change in all educational programs in response to current criticisms of the joylessness, irrelevancy, and lack of aspirations evident in many American schools. The Regents do, however, believe that joy, relevancy, and aspirations are fundamental to successful learning, and therefore seek a reading program for all schools which will encourage children to want to learn, and which will make it possible for them to learn.

The recommendations of this paper concerning instructional methods and materials, grouping and grading, and the role of the teacher and the administrator are all designed to create conditions in which

students will want to learn and will be able to learn. The primary focus of this paper, however, is on the need for a reading program which is based on continuous assessment of the strengths and weaknesses which each child brings to the reading process, and continuous involvement of each child in successful learning experiences. Such a program relies on the student's increased personal involvement and success in learning as the major motivating forces for further learning.

9) *More adequate instruments must be used to measure individual reading achievement and the effectiveness of the reading program.* The current system of evaluating reading achievement through standardized tests does not adequately measure individual reading proficiency, nor does it provide teachers of reading with the necessary information for determining individual reading needs and selecting appropriate instructional techniques and materials to meet these needs.

The tests currently in wide use are primarily useful for measuring the distribution of general reading achievement levels within large populations, in terms of selected broad areas of reading skills. Such tests help to locate those students who differ sharply from the norm on either end of the achievement scale, but they are of little value in determining the causes of these differences, and therefore do not assist teachers in coming to terms with specific reading needs. In most cases, the items on these tests are too general to serve as accurate measures of specific skill needs. Moreover, since the tasks used to measure general skills vary greatly from test to test, and even from level to level within a given series of tests, they are imprecise indicators of actual skill development and needs. While normative standardized tests will continue to serve as useful measures for assessing and comparing the broad range of reading achievement within large populations, the great need is for an evaluation system which will enable teachers to accurately assess individual reading strengths and weaknesses, and to prescribe learning activities which meet each individual student's needs.

New York State is nearing completion of a new evaluation system which will provide teachers with the information they require in order to continuously assess needs, select instructional techniques and materials, evaluate individual progress toward instructional objectives, and compare the effectiveness of different instructional treatments on varied populations. The new evaluation system is based on precise descriptions of the specific skills each individual must acquire to become a proficient reader. On the basis of these essential skills, a bank of learning objectives for reading education has been developed. These objectives will serve as guidelines for the content of the reading

program, and as performance standards for determining when each student has mastered particular skills essential to reading proficiency.

The test items in the new evaluation system will contain tasks which measure the individual student's progress toward meeting instructional objectives. Unlike most items on normative standardized tests, these items will be matched to the specific objectives and content of the instruction which preceded the testing. and will therefore more adequately measure the effectiveness of the instruction. More important, however, given a set of reliably constructed and tested learning objectives, the system will make it possible to objectively evaluate each individual's mastery of specific essential reading tasks.

THE TEACHER OF READING

However well designed the reading program may be, it will only have the required impact if it is managed by teachers who are adequately prepared in the theory and practice of reading education, and fully committed to the goal of educating every child in their classrooms. The learner-centered, diagnostic and prescriptive approach to reading instruction creates a new role for the teacher of reading, expanding his potential for the personal and professional rewards of successful teaching, but also placing new demands on his capabilities and commitment.

The new reading program in no way diminishes the importance of effective interpersonal relations and communication with students. In fact, by its very nature, the learner-centered program requires that the teacher be sensitive to the uniqueness of each individual and aware of the personal experiences, interests, abilities, and problems each child brings to the reading process. Above all, the teacher must believe in the student's capacity to learn. If the teacher does not expect the child to learn, it is unlikely that he will learn.

But the teacher of reading must be proficient as well as humane. He must be a perpetual student of child development, of the learning process, and of the reading process. For each student, he must continuously assess needs, formulate goals, select instructional alternatives, and evaluate achievement. He must organize and manage the classroom in ways which motivate and facilitate learning.

These responsibilities obviously require that teachers of reading have adequate professional preparation. Yet many teacher education programs provide little exposure to the theory and practice of reading instruction. A State Education Department survey conducted in 1968 indicated that 50 percent of the teachers with baccalaureate degrees

in their first year of public school service had no specific preparation for teaching reading beyond a general elementary or language arts methods course. In the same survey, when teachers were asked to evaluate their own competencies, they indicated that they felt least adequate in the area of individualized instruction. The findings of this survey, and the continued failure of existing programs to serve all students, are evidence of the need for new approaches in both preservice and inservice teacher education.

Preservice Education

Recognizing the need for immediate and large-scale improvement in the quality of the teaching of reading, the Regents have approved an amendment to the Regulations of the Commissioner, requiring that all persons seeking certification as elementary teachers in New York State have specific preparation for the teaching of reading.

As of January 1972, for continued approval and registration of programs, higher education institutions in New York State which prepare elementary teachers are required to provide evidence to the State Education Deparmtent that persons recommended for certification have demonstrated specific competencies in the teaching of reading.

As of January 1972, a minimum of six semester hours in the teaching of reading is required for all persons seeking elementary certification on an individual basis. This requirement will apply to persons from out-of-state institutions and to persons who complete their work in New York State but are not certified through recommendation by an approved teacher education program.

At present, no regulations exist to determine who may be employed as a reading specialist. The Department is presently engaged in determining the qualifications needed by the reading specialist and in incorporating these in a certification program for reading specialists. Until that time, the responsibility for seeking out persons with appropriate professional preparation will continue to rest entirely with local educational agencies.

Inservice Education

The State will direct its major inservice education efforts at improving the quality of the teaching of reading in large urban areas. Recognizing that effecting change requires involvement and commitment of maximum numbers of people, the State will seek to multiply the impact of inservice education programs in these areas. Exemplary summer

programs for disadvantaged students will serve as laboratories for inservice education of urban teachers, who will in turn provide inservice programs in their home school districts the following school year. In New York City alone, such a program could provide a cadre of 200 teachers able to conduct inservice programs reaching thousands of other teachers. Similar efforts to multiply the impact of inservice education in other areas of the State will be planned and coordinated on a regional basis.

The State will continue to encourage and support inservice workshops at the local level. It will supplement group programs by developing and disseminating self-contained and self-directing resource packages which will enable individual teachers and administrators to develop specific proficiencies in reading instruction. The State will seek to broaden the scope of inservice education to include the training of teacher aides, paraprofessionals, and volunteers who work in the reading program.

ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

Administrators at the local, regional, and State levels must create an administrative climate which encourages adoption of an effectively designed reading program in every school, and provide leadership and supportive services which ensure that, once adopted, the program is successful.

The Local Administrator

The local administrator must educate his staff and the public concerning the principles of an effective reading program. He must evaluate policies concerning such matters as school and classroom organization, to ensure that they facilitate effective reading instruction. He must provide adequate support systems for classroom teachers, including the services of a qualified reading specialist and materials necessary for individualized instruction. He should encourage classroom demonstration of effective practices and frequent interchange of information between staff members. He has a major responsibility for evaluating innovative programs and ensuring that successful program elements are incorporated into other programs. Finally, the local administrator must motivate his staff by giving his personal recognition to success, and by his own personal involvement in efforts to improve reading achievement.

State Leadership

In addition to the services described under *Inservice Education,* the State will continue to assist local school districts to develop reading programs which have the essential characteristics outlined in this paper. State assistance will include:

- Direct grants to school districts for programs geared to meeting the critical reading needs of students lacking adequate pre-reading experiences or reading skills. The State will assign the highest priority to those schools in the urban and metropolitan areas where the need is greatest.
- Consultation with local districts on program design, development, and improvement.
- Collection and sharing of information on the advantages and disadvantages of such concepts as ungraded class structure, continuous progress plans, team teaching, differentiated staffing, open schools, and learning laboratories.
- Encouragement of better regional arrangements for supportive services. The Boards of Cooperative Educational Services will be encouraged to collect multimedia instructional materials and train teachers in the use of them, to establish reading centers for use by local districts, and to provide pupil personnel services not available through local districts.
- Formulation of behavorial objectives which define the critical skills required for minimal and maximal reading proficiency. These objectives will be made available for the use of schools in developing the basis for improved systems to evaluate individual reading ability.
- Construction of a system for program evaluation and development which will enable local districts to more accurately analyze individual student growth and effectiveness of the reading program. The first application of this new system will be directed toward the evaluation of ESEA Title I reading programs. When perfected, the system will be available for evaluating all reading programs.
- Assistance in establishing local Reading Task Forces of educators and laymen, who will promote the improvement of local reading programs.

CONCLUSION

This position paper has outlined the essential characteristics of a reading program which will enable the schools of this State to eliminate functional illiteracy among thousands of elementary and secondary students, and to attain the ultimate goal of reading education, which is people who can and do use reading for the achievement of educational and occupational goals, the cultivation of the imagination and the enjoyment of leisure time, and full participation in social and civic life. There is no more important priority for education in New York State than adoption of such a program in every school.

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